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ACCULTURATION AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF CONTACT AMONG HISPANIC AND --ETC(U)

AUG 82 H C TRIANDIS, G MARIN, H BETANCOURT

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# PERSONNEL TECHNOLOGY

AN EXAMINATION OF HISPANIC AND GENERAL POPULATION  
PERCEPTIONS OF ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENTS  
(Harry C. Triandis, Principal Investigator)



DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY  
UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS  
URBANA-CHAMPAIGN, ILLINOIS 61820

Prepared with the support of:

The Organizational Effectiveness Research Programs of the Office of Naval Research  
(Code 452) under Contract N 00014-80-C-0407; NR 170-906

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ACCULTURATION AND THE ACCEPTANCE OF CONTACT  
AMONG HISPANIC AND MAINSTREAM NAVY RECRUITS

Technical Report ONR-20

August, 1982

Accession For	
NTIS	<input type="checkbox"/>
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Unannounced	<input type="checkbox"/>
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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE		READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM
1. REPORT NUMBER ONR-20	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. <b>AD A22 9043</b>	3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle) Acculturation and the Acceptance of Contact among Hispanic and Mainstream Navy Recruits		5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED Interim Technical Report
7. AUTHOR(s) Harry C. Triandis Gerardo Marin Hector Betancourt		6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS Department of Psychology University of Illinois 603 E. Daniel, Champaign, IL 61820		9. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s) N 00014-80-C-0407
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS Organizational Effectiveness Research Group Office of Naval Research (Code 442) Arlington, VA 22217		10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS NF 170-906
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)		12. REPORT DATE August, 1982
		13. NUMBER OF PAGES 7
		15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report) Unclassified
		15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE
16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report) Approved for public release; distribution unlimited. Reproduction in whole or in part is permitted for any purpose of the U.S. Government.		
17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)		
18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES		
19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) Hispanics, Contact, Acculturation		
20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number) The hypothesis that Hispanic Navy recruits will find contact behaviors more acceptable than Mainstream Navy recruits was not supported. This is consistent with many other findings of the current project showing		

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S/N 0102-LM 014-5601

Unclassified

SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

Unclassified

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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

similarities in the responses of the Hispanic and Mainstream recruits. One finding of this study was that those Mainstream recruits who have not been exposed to other cultures were more likely to disapprove of contact behaviors which the more culturally-sophisticated Mainstream and Hispanic recruits found acceptable. The similarities found between Mainstream and Hispanic recruits seem to be due to the Hispanics' responding in terms of increasing the social desirability of their responses within the context of the majority Anglo culture.

S/N 0102- LF 014- 6601

Unclassified

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Acculturation and the Acceptance of Contact  
among Hispanics and Mainstream Navy Recruits

Harry C. Triandis	Gerardo Marín, and Hector Betancourt
University of Illinois	Spanish Speaking Mental Health Research Center
Urbana-Champaign	University of California, Los Angeles

Hall (1959) suggested that Mediterranean cultures (Arabs, Greeks, Italians, Spanish, and South Americans) are "contact" cultures, i.e. people are more likely to touch, to stand near to each other, to lean over toward the other in a conversation, to use loud voices, to orient their bodies so they face each other, and to look each other in the eye during interaction, than in no-contact cultures (Northern Europeans, Indians, and East Asians). Numerous investigations employing observational techniques (e.g., Watson, 1970), simulations (e.g., Little, 1965) and experimental methodologies (e.g., Aiello & Jones, 1971; Baxter, 1970; Ford & Graves, 1977) have confirmed this observation.

While the differences in preferred interpersonal space have been found among very young Hispanic children (Aiello & Jones, 1971; Baxter, 1970; Ford & Graves, 1977), two studies have found that as subjects increase in age the differences between Hispanics in the United States and Mainstreams tend to disappear (Ford & Graves, 1977; Jones, 1971). This could be due to greater acculturation on the part of the older subjects tested or to their being more aware of the majority norms and their conforming to them.

The present study asked respondents to rate their reactions to situations involving contact with another person. It was expected that following the majority of the studies in the area, differences would be found between Hispanics and Mainstreams, where Hispanics would find the contact situations more acceptable than the Mainstream respondents.

## Method

### Subjects

Forty-one Hispanic and 49 Mainstream Navy recruits responded to a questionnaire while being classified into Navy jobs as part of a larger study of their perceptions of the social environment. In each of the three Navy recruit stations (Florida, California and Illinois) when a Spanish-surname recruit was to be classified, the officer in charge checked the recruit's self-identification on an application form on which "Hispanic" was one of the ways in which the applicant could describe himself. If the Spanish-surnamed recruit had selected the "Hispanic" self-identification label, he was asked to complete the questionnaire. At the same time another recruit (with a non-Spanish surname) was randomly chosen and given the same questionnaire.

### Instrument

Sixteen situations, determined from interviews with Hispanic and Mainstream samples about paralinguistic behaviors, were presented (e.g., TWO MALE FRIENDS EMBRACE EACH OTHER EVERY TIME THEY MEET). The subjects were required to rate the appropriateness of the behavior on a 7-point scale (1= This behavior is inappropriate to 7= This behavior is appropriate).

## Results and Discussion

Factor analyses of the responses of the Hispanic and Mainstream samples suggested that each sample had five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.00. The Hispanics tended to respond more or less the same way to all the scales since their first factor accounted for 61% of the common variance. Their other factors clustered as (2) "people who are very intense" (come close to you, move face muscles a lot, pass you in the street without looking), (3) "people who touch," (4) "people who gesture" and (5) "people who are conventional" (come close to you, shake hands everytime they see each other).

The Mainstream sample provided more differentiated responses, since

their first factor accounted for only 40% of the common variance which may be labeled "unusual people" (males who embrace, friends of same sex who walk with their arms around each other, person who looks down when talking to someone of importance or prestige). A second factor includes "people who touch," a third "people who avoid others," a fourth factor included "people who gesture and touch" and a fifth factor included neutral behaviors (shakes hands, touches arm of another person when talking).

Thus, since the factor structures are not identical we must conclude that the two cultural groups do not see the behaviors as having identical meanings. This is not surprising since previous evidence has shown that many behaviors have different meanings for Hispanics and for the Mainstream. For example, looking down when talking to someone of importance and prestige is perceived as a sign of showing respect for Hispanics while for the Mainstream it may be an actual insult (Albert, 1977).

Comparisons of the means on the 16 behaviors are not legitimate given that the scales appear to have different meanings for the two samples. Nevertheless, chi-squares were run, and only one of the 16 tests reached significance. The Mainstream considered as inappropriate for a person to move his face muscles a lot when talking while the Hispanics considered it appropriate ( $p < .04$ ). Thus, we must conclude that there are no reliable differences between our Hispanic and Mainstream samples on etic contact variables, and that the two cultures look at contact very differently, in a manner that cannot be compared.

As mentioned above, these similarities on the way certain behaviors are perceived by our Hispanic and Mainstream respondents could be due to the fact that the Hispanics have acculturated enough to eliminate certain culture-specific differences. This hypothesis was tested through the respondents' responses to two indices of acculturation developed by Triandis, Hui, Lisansky and Marín (1982). One index, called Family History, reflected the length of



stay in the U.S.; the birthplace of the subject, of the subject's parents and other relatives; and, the citizenship of his closest relatives. High scores mean that the subject has mostly American relatives and lived mostly in the U.S. The second index reflected attitudes. It was indexed by agreement with the statement that he would like his children to attend Mainstream schools and with the statement that he would like to have Mainstream co-workers.

These two indices were correlated with the appropriateness judgments. For the Hispanic Navy recruits the acculturation indices showed only one significant correlation with the appropriateness judgments. The Family History index correlated with the appropriateness of A PERSON MOVES HIS FACE MUSCLES A LOT WHEN TALKING .32 ( $p < .02$ ). In all probability this is just a chance finding.

For the Mainstream sample, however, there were several significant relationships. Subjects with mostly U.S. parents and relatives disapproved of TWO FRIENDS OF THE SAME SEX HOLD HANDS WHEN TALKING TO EACH OTHER ( $r = -.31$ ;  $p < .05$ ), of TWO FRIENDS OF THE SAME SEX WALK WITH THEIR ARMS AROUND EACH OTHER ( $r = -.37$ ,  $p < .01$ ), A PERSON WHO STANDS FAR FROM OTHERS IN AN ELEVATOR ( $r = -.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ), and A PERSON MOVES HIS FACE MUSCLES A LOT WHEN TALKING ( $r = -.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ). The second acculturation index, showed that Mainstream subjects who wanted only Mainstream co-workers and wanted their children to attend only Mainstream schools disapproved of A PERSON TALKS VERY LOUDLY WHEN TALKING WITH ANOTHER INDIVIDUAL. ( $r = -.30$ ,  $p < .02$ ).

The above results seem to disconfirm the belief that the similarities between Hispanics and Mainstreams on their perceptions of certain contact behaviors were due to the Hispanics' level of acculturation to the majority Mainstream culture. An alternative explanation for these findings could be that the Hispanics have learned to distinguish cultural differences between their culture and that of the majority group and perform (in the case of the

experimental studies that found no differences in proxemic behaviors) or rate behaviors (in this study) in a way that would agree with the majority's expectancies. This social desirability phenomenon has been found as a plausible explanation for differences in responses given by bilinguals when answering in their primary or secondary tongue to an attitude scale (Marín, Triandis, Betancourt & Kashima, 1982) and seems to be the reason for a recently conducted study on proxemic behavior. In that experiment, Sussman and Rosenfeld (1982) studied 35 Japanese (very low contact), 31 Venezuelan (high contact) and 39 Americans (moderately low contact), as they had a 5-minute conversation on a common topic with a same-sex, same-nationality confederate, speaking their native language or English. The authors predicted and found larger conversation distances for the Japanese, small distances for the Venezuelans and intermediate distances for the Americans when using their native languages. The average distances for Japanese males was 106 cms., for Americans 100 and for Venezuelans 92 centimeters; for females the means were 95, 78, and 71 respectively. The same students, however, when speaking in English used the American norms, so that the Japanese increased and the Venezuelans decreased their contact levels ending at about 100 cms. of distance.

It is also interesting to note that it was those Mainstream respondents who had little contact or exposure to other cultures (high acculturation scores--i.e. parents and most other relatives were U.S. born) who rejected several behaviors which the more culture-sophisticated Mainstream subjects and the Hispanic respondents found acceptable. This is consistent with the notion that people who have had limited cross-cultural experience will be more offended by behaviors that break their norms than people who have been exposed to a diversity of culturally-based behavior patterns.

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